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C O N F I D E N T I A L TAIPEI 001841

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [TW](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: VATICAN ASKS TAIWAN NOT TO SEND SENIOR OFFICIALS
TO PAPAL INAUGURAL

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason: 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) National Security Council (NSC) Senior Advisor Lin Jin-chang told AIT April 19 that the Vatican Foreign Ministry has requested that Taiwan not send any ranking official to ceremonies to inaugurate the next Pope. Lin said the Vatican's list of "ranking officials" includes the President, Vice President, Premier, Foreign Minister, Minister of National Defense, and Speaker of the Legislative Yuan (LY). Lin said that Taipei had not intended for President Chen Shui-bian to attend the upcoming ceremonies, but has been considering dispatching either the Foreign Minister or Legislative Speaker.

2. (C) Lin said Taipei is puzzled over the apparent downgrade, adding that Vatican officials did not provide a clear explanation for the request. Given the formal diplomatic relationship between Taiwan and the Holy See, Lin said that it would be natural for Taipei to send a senior level official to such ceremonies. Lin asserted that President Chen carefully followed ground rules for his attendance at ceremonies for John Paul II, including by refusing requests for interviews from Italian and international media outlets. Lin asked if the USG had any insights into the Vatican request.

3. (C) Comment: The Vatican's request for a low-profile Taiwan presence at upcoming inaugural ceremonies may be aimed at giving the new Pope a clean slate to deal with the PRC over the range of issues left unresolved by John Paul II, including the Vatican's recognition of Taiwan. While Chen may have kept a low profile on the ground in Rome, the Taiwan media loudly hailed his attendance at the ceremonies as a major diplomatic coup and reaffirmation of the strength of Taiwan-Vatican ties. The PRC's strong public condemnation of Chen's attendance at the memorial may have also convinced Vatican diplomats that future negotiations with Beijing may be greatly complicated by these sorts of high-profile visits.
PAAL